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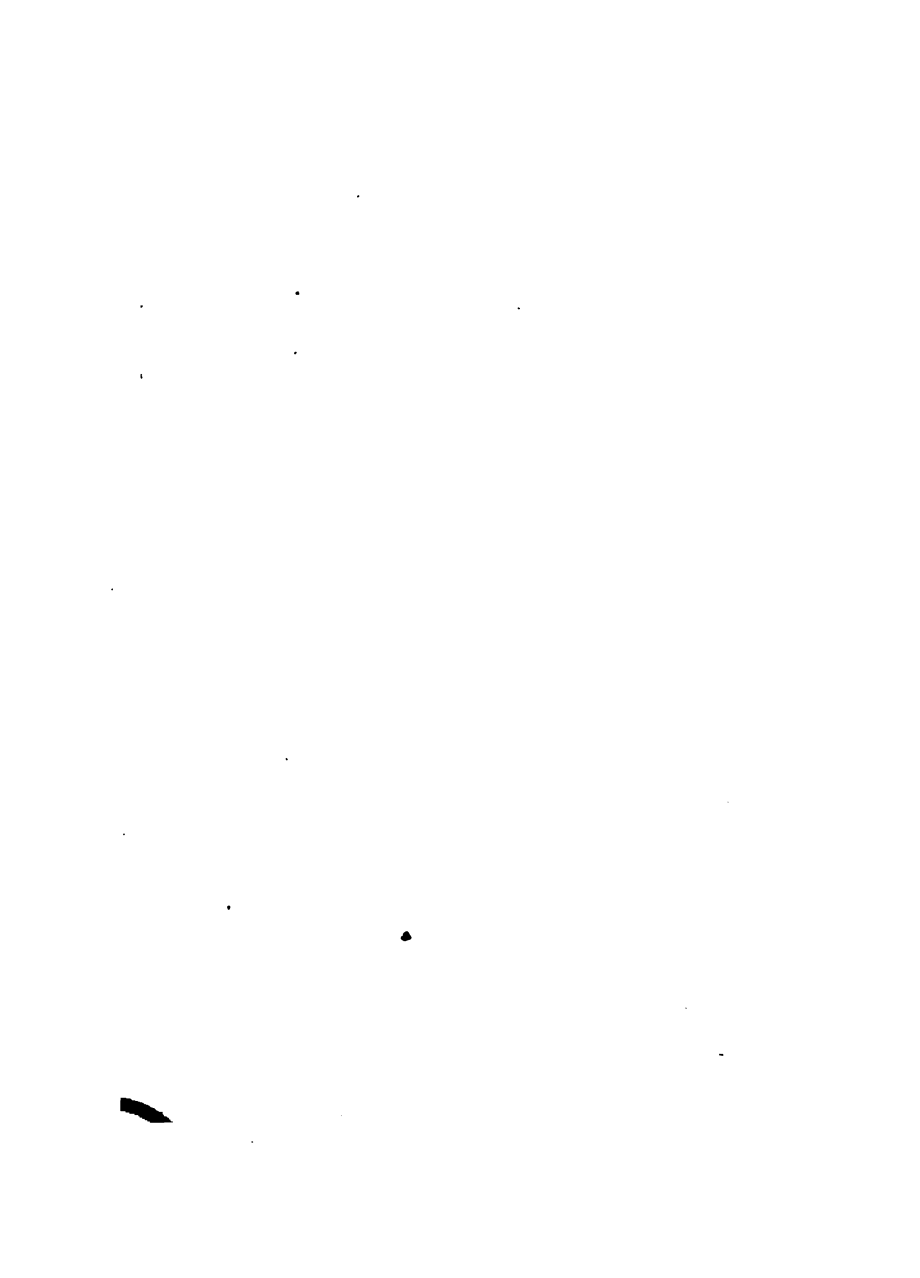
CATHERINE FELL SMITH

JAMES PARNELL

Presented by
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JAMES PARNELL



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INTRODUCTION.

THE short, but remarkable career of James Parnell has always had a great interest for members of the Society of Friends, both in England and America ; and the Quarterly Meeting of the Society for Essex and Suffolk, in view of the circumstance that the 250th anniversary of his tragic death in Colchester Castle occurs in 1906, have encouraged the preparation of this volume, giving a fresh account of his life's work and early martyrdom.

"The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church," and truly, in this case, the seed fell on ground well prepared to bring forth an abundant harvest.

In 1656 Colchester had already passed through many vicissitudes in its long history ; and its people had learned to love religious freedom and to succour the persecuted ones. The town had had experience of Roman Catholic supremacy, and in the Lollards' struggle for an open

Bible, its inhabitants had a noble share. They had seen William Chieveling, a tailor of the town, condemned for heresy "on Wednesday, in the vigil of the feast of the Apostles Simon and Jude" (28th October, 1428), and committed to the Moot Hall until a writ from King Henry VI. was received by the bailiffs, "firmly enjoining" them to "cause his body to be burned in flame of fire, in some public and open place within the liberty of the town, for a manifest example to other Christians." And this was done to "maintain and defend Holy Church and its rights and liberties." It is more than likely that those who watched the poor tailor burn in the Castle Bailey on that "Thursday following the feast of All Saints," saw clearly that this was no way to "root out heresies" from the minds of Englishmen.

When the great Benedictine Abbey of St. John, the Augustinian Priory of St. Botolph, with the houses of the Grey Friars and the Crossed Friars, of Colchester, were suppressed by Henry VIII., the people welcomed the Reformation and hoped for new liberties. Under the reaction during Queen Mary's reign, twenty-five men and women belonging to the town were

burned to death or expired in prisons. The struggle for religious freedom in France and the Netherlands resulted in large numbers of refugees settling in Colchester, who became so important and useful to the community that the authorities granted to the Flemings All Saints Church, wherein to worship God in their own language, and made the like privilege of St. Giles's Church to the French Huguenots.

In 1648, the town suffered all the horrors of siege and famine, during the struggle between the Royalists and the army of the Parliament. So that, in 1655, with the memory of these terrible events and their own sufferings fresh in their hearts, the Quaker doctrines of peace, goodwill and gospel freedom were readily received by the people, especially by the refugees, whose sympathies were stimulated by the death of Parnell, as well as by the condition of the many prisoners languishing for conscience sake, both in the Castle dungeons and the cells of the old Moot Hall.

One of the first converts to the preaching of James Parnell was Steven Crisp, who soon became the organiser of the new community in Colchester, and afterwards the missionary to, and

founder of, the Society of Friends in Holland and parts of North Germany.

There are no exact statements to give of the number of members and adherents of the Society in Colchester in these early days ; but from the entries of births, marriages and burials in Meeting minute-books, we can arrive at it with some degree of accuracy. Cromwell, in his "History of Colchester," says that in 1659 there were twenty-five burials. "From 5th month [July] 1665 to 10th month [December], 1666, ninety-eight Friends died of the plague. In 1675 there were thirty-one deaths from general causes ; in 1708, thirty-two ; and in 1726, twenty-two. Of marriages there were sometimes seven in the year, and in one year, fifteen births are recorded." From this and other information it may be computed that the numbers belonging to the four meetings in Colchester must have been at least 1,000, the total population of the town being reckoned in 1692 at 6,852.

It is striking to reflect that all this great following arose in the first place from the seed sown by one earnest young minister *who died before he was twenty years old.*

The meeting of the town of Colchester was called the "Two Weeks Meeting." Numerous small gatherings in the locality as at Harwich, Manningtree, Bentley, Horkesley and Copford, formed the Monthly Meeting of Colchester, and these, with others in the country parts of Essex, comprised the Quarterly Meeting of Coggeshall.

So important was Colchester in the Society at large, that at the General Meeting of Ministers, held in London in 1672, when the organisation of the Society throughout the country was finally completed, it was arranged that a Yearly Meeting of representatives should be held annually in London in Whit week, the basis of representation being six members from London, three from Bristol, and two from the town of Colchester, one or two from each of the counties of England and Wales respectively.

Afterwards, when the Society suffered a great decline in numbers, these early regulations were changed; the meeting at Colchester was merged in the Quarterly Meeting, and its special representation at the Yearly Meeting ceased.

Much fresh information has been collected for this account of James Parnell, and for the

brief notice of the sufferings of many Essex members of the Society in those early days, by the author, whose studies of the Crisp Collection of Quaker MSS. at Colchester, and upon the lives of Friends for the *Dictionary of National Biography* are well known. It is hoped that the little book may not only interest local readers, but inspire others, both in this country and in America, to emulate these devoted servants of God in their strivings to follow and obey the leadings of the Holy Spirit.

WILSON MARRIAGE.

Colchester,

June, 1906.

CHAPTER I.

BIRTH AND EDUCATION.

IN the year 1636, there was born at East Retford, in the county of Nottingham, a youth, whose early and tragic death at nineteen years of age, combined with his undoubted gifts of penmanship and eloquence, his rare devotion and high courage, were to render him conspicuous in the early annals of Quakerism. The hand of persecution, resulting from misconception, dislike and dread of innovation, as much as from sheer cruelty, fell upon James Parnell more heavily than upon any other of the first Friends.

His very short and insignificant figure, his appearance of arrested adolescence, conveyed to those who knew him nothing of the English dogged persistence and steadfast determination concealed beneath that "mean" exterior. The enemies he made everywhere by his bluntness and plain speaking perhaps thought

to cure his stubbornness, and bring him to their own way of thinking in the end ; but James's short life only proved that though they might destroy his body, the spirit that fought for truth, as he saw it, was unconquerable. As a mere schoolboy, he himself escaped from " the house of bondage"—forms and rules and empty profession—to a spiritual liberty of his own, and from this moment he went straight forward to fight for the divine right of individual conscience, and put down, what seemed to him, the hierarchy of sacerdotalism.

As the short pages of the lad's life unfold, we shall be able to trace in it the workings of eternal truth, which brought him out of that early crude and self-assertive monopoly of all right thinking, coupled with a corresponding condemnation of every other shade and colour of thought, to a calm dependence on the immediate revelation to be daily manifested in him, a gentle yet heroic endurance, and a truly Christ-like forgiveness for his own ill-usage.

It would be idle to revive the story of these unremembered and uncanonised saints, who, unknowing, offered up their lives as a gift in the cause of liberty and progress, were it not to

remind ourselves of the heritage we possess in the fight they fought for tolerance and free opinion. The real issues, however, of their sacrifice, will be missed, if the standards, the traditions, practices and ideas of the times are not steadily borne in mind.

In 1636, the year of Parnell's birth, the religious life of the people of England was full of contrasting phases. A rising wave of Puritanism had followed the Reformation; but Catholicism, the religion of the Queen, still maintained a strong hold upon the people, and converts were daily made; in Scotland, a sturdy Presbyterianism was gathering strength against the inroads of Laudian innovations. Charles I. had carried on a feeble Government for eight years without a Parliament. Laud had instituted the Star Chamber proceedings which, in that very year, had condemned an Essex man, Henry Burton—the writer of a new Litany, “from bishops, priests and deacons, good Lord, deliver us”—with two other pamphleteers, Prynne and Bastwick, to stand mutilated in a pillory for hours, and to be imprisoned for life. Inside the Church, men like William Chillingworth and John

Hales were pleading for unity, tolerance and harmony of worship. Outside, sects were multiplying with extraordinary rapidity, in spite of what Dr. Gardiner has called the rooted traditional belief of the average Englishman, that all religious liberty was anarchy, and that it was the duty of the State to allow no man to worship as it seemed right in his own eyes, but only as the State itself prescribed. The Church itself seemed to have lost sight of the hidden meaning and soul of worship, and to be wholly occupied with minor disputes : whether the sacrament should be administered as heretofore to each person in his own seat in the church, or only at the communion rails ; whether and where there should be any rails ; or in punishing any private person who attempted to teach or preach, women who appeared to give thanks for child-birth without a veil on their heads, and men who worked in the fields on Saints' days, including the 5th of November.

Laud's revised Prayer-book and new canons had been issued, and received with a storm of opposition, especially in Scotland. All men, everywhere, were occupied firstly and lastly with shades of religious beliefs ; almost their sole

literature was religious books and pamphlets, which issued from the press by thousands; and consequently the use of Biblical language, of prophetic utterances and terms of stern invective, was universal.

Political and ecclesiastical dissatisfaction rankled together in almost every man's heart, fostered by the infamy of Laud's pillories as well as incensed by the grinding tyranny of Charles's unjust taxes. Milton, the poet of Puritanism, was twenty-eight years old when Parnell was born. George Fox, a lad of twelve, was minding his sheep or plying his shoemaker's awl, "Righteous Christer," his father, still having under consideration the project for bringing the boy up to enter the Church. Oliver Cromwell, a country squire of thirty-seven, had succeeded as heir to his uncle's estate, and was living at Ely, farming the cathedral tithes, undergoing spiritual and mental conflicts, and preparing to enter Parliament and become a people's leader.

Such, in outline, was the condition of England when the child of this narrative was born.

His birthplace, the borough of East Retford—Redeford in Domesday, from the turbid red

colour of the ford over the river Idle in rainy weather—has been a place of considerable importance since before Edward I. From 1315 to 1330, and from 1571 to 1885, it sent two members to Parliament. It has a fine market-place, beautifully approached, and a striking church, built, in cathedral form, round a handsome central tower. For an illustration of this I am indebted to Canon Ebsworth. On the other side of the Idle is West Retford, also included within the borough.

In September, 1636, the future young minister was born at East Retford, and his baptism duly entered on the 6th of the month by John Watt, vicar, in the parish register. By the kindness of the present vicar, the Rev. Canon A. F. Ebsworth, I am able to reproduce this interesting entry, which has now been first made public.

Framed Sonnet of Thomas Parnell and Sarah his wife. September 6th.

“ 1636. Jeames Sonne of Thomas Parnell and Saraij his wife. September 6th.”

James had an elder sister, born in March, 1634, and named after her mother, Sarah ; other children there do not appear to have been.

Parnell does not anywhere mention his parents by name, and indeed seems, after he became a Friend, to have completely cut himself adrift from all his early associations. The only allusion to either of them is when he says he followed his father's trade. This, without any very definite foundation, has been variously stated to have been shoemaking and farming. The family circumstances were apparently easy enough to permit him a good education, and, after he had espoused his father's calling, whatever it was, occasional absences from home and daily occupation. In the list of Aldermen for the borough of East Retford for the year 1607, thirty years before he was born, are the names of Henry and Richard Parnell, both being described as "gentlemen." This seems to establish young Parnell's claim to more or less gentle birth and breeding. His friends were good church people, and he was baptised in the beautiful sixteenth century font of St. Swithun's church, East Retford, decorated by a figure of that pious, humble-minded, nature-loving bishop himself, who, when he came to die near his own minster in royal Winchester, bade his followers bury him where his grave might

be trod by human feet, and watered with the rain-drops of heaven.


Unusual opportunities for education existed in the town of Parnell's birth. Retford Grammar School had existed as a chantry school, kept by the chantry priests, long before the Reformation. It was refounded and re-endowed under the Chantry Act of 1548, with the title of Edward the Sixth's Grammar School, although, indeed, the young king did nothing for it save to permit the bailiff and burgesses of the town to apply to its maintenance the rent of the lands which foregone benefactors had willed for that express purpose, as well as the house provided in a like manner for the master, whose salary was fixed in 1552 at £10 a year. His usher, or undermaster, was rewarded by a yearly stipend of £5 5s. 3d. The original school-house, situated on the north side of Chapelgate, was replaced by new buildings in 1779, and in 1855, the School was rebuilt on a site farther removed from the centre of the town, where it still flourishes, with 200 or more scholars.

In the old school did young Parnell, it is generally agreed (although no early admission books exist to prove it), receive his early training and

education. Sewel, the historian of Friends, writing some sixty years afterwards, says "he was trained up in the schools of literature." His writings show him to have been acquainted with a certain amount of the classics and history, as well as to have possessed a power of argument and a clearness in reasoning hardly to be gained without a systematic training.

His knowledge of the Scriptures was thorough and exhaustive; for this, however, he was indebted less to his teachers, whoever they may have been, than to his own studious habits and serious turn of mind.

His own evidence also points to his having been a Grammar School boy:—"I was sent," he says, "unto the schools of humane learning for to learn human wisdom, for which the Schools are profitable, but for the attaining of heavenly wisdom and knowledge, they are as far unprofitable, and many books that are there read are much for the corrupting of youth and the nourishing of the wild, profane nature." According to his own account of himself, he was "as perfect in sin" as any in the town, and, with a certain saving grace of humility amid much self-consciousness and introspection,



he adds that he "even exceeded many" in the wickedness of his life. The picture of the lad at this time, which is present to our imagination is of a small, under-sized, intelligent and clever scholar of thirteen or fourteen, somewhat sickly in his appearance,—“mean,” his friends have it,—old for his years, reading, thinking on many things, precocious in intellect, and proportionately flattered and made much of by his friends. We may suppose him of rather variable moods, outbursts of boyish gaiety and natural spirits being succeeded by periods of self-chiding and gloom, fostered and engendered by the prevalent Puritan view of things, which held all traffic with any other occupation than the sober business of saving one's own soul to be a serious digression from the true art of living, that would surely entail eternal loss and damnation.

CHAPTER II.

CALLED TO BE A QUAKER.

WHAT his occupation was, James does not, as already mentioned, inform us, but it was evidently of an elastic nature that permitted his absence from time to time.


In the mittimus under which he was sent to Colchester Castle in 1655, he is described as "James Parnel, who saith he was born at Retford, in the county of Nottingham, labourer." This document Parnell describes as full of lies and slanders, and says, "out of their changeable minds they set me down 'James Parnel, labourer.'" He does not, however, deny the truth of this particular statement, for, says he, "I am a labourer in the gospel of God, and none can tax me with idleness." And when in prison, he drew up a lengthy paper of sixty-one queries, which he sent to four Essex clergymen, begging them to say "whether it is not as lawful now for fisher-

men, ploughmen, or herdsmen, to preach, if they be called to it, and fitted for it, by the same power and spirit as they was in the days of old ? ”

In another place he says he was apprenticed to his father at a trade ; this may have been a still stronger reason for his parents’ annoyance at his deserting his occupation for the very unremunerative one of itinerant preaching.

When he was about fifteen, James was already in the grip of a spiritual regeneration, seeking, dissatisfied with all he found, for truer guidance than he had. He went to the “ priests ” with his difficulties, but they only told him he was “ deluded.” Some of the neighbouring clergymen were, he gives us to understand, a considerable stumbling-block to him, “ preaching down with their tongues what they upheld in their lives.” His account of them, written when he was about eighteen, savours of a certain amount of spiritual pride and self-consciousness, characteristic of his fighting years, but which during the long imprisonment leading to his tragic end, completely dropped away from him.

When he says, “ I was the first in all that town [*i.e.* Retford], which the Lord was pleased to make known his power in and turn my heart




towards him, and truly to seek him, so that I became a wonder to the world and an astonishment to the heathen round about," he is forgetting that he cannot possibly know what secret influences for good there may have been working in other hearts in the town of Retford. Probably he only means he was the first Quaker, but there were other seekers and finders of the Lord, in those days even, besides the Quakers. He goes on to tell us how his relations "became his enemies," so annoyed were they with his taking up the reproach and the shame of the world, "not conforming to their words, ways, fellowship and worship, nor respecting persons, either in word and deed." No doubt they found him thoroughly impracticable, talking, out of the mouth of a mere schoolboy, with the wisdom of age combined with the obstinacy of youth; too old to be flogged, too young to hear reason and reflect upon it.

So, "the priests" failing him in his hour of need, he sought for "some other people with whom he might have union." It was a time of seeking. All the country places teemed with sects, meeting in privacy, waiting for the coming of a spiritual and political revolution. "There

was a people with whom I found union," says Parnell, "a few miles from the town where I lived. The Lord was a gathering them out of the dark world, to sit down together and wait upon his name."

He may be here referring to Fox's first followers in Nottinghamshire, or to the "Seekers" or "Waiters," a sect which did not celebrate either baptism or the Lord's supper, and whose members, as Penn says, "waited together in silence to be instruments in the hand of the Lord." In many respects this sect strongly resembled Friends, although they had no permanence and did not increase in numbers. Cromwell, in speaking of them, remarked with much wit that "to be a Seeker is to be of the next best sect to a Finder." Large numbers of them became Fox's followers.

At any rate, it was not long before Parnell met with the Nottinghamshire Quakers, and heard through them of Fox, that remarkable young man, whose fame had already spread through the country, and who now lay in gaol in the Castle at Carlisle, for the offence of preaching. Him he determined to go and see at all costs.



It was in 1647, when he was twenty-three years old, that Fox came from his home in Leicestershire to Nottingham, where he found "a tender people." Here he made one of his first converts, Elizabeth Hooton, a "very tender woman," and the first female preacher of Quakerism. At Mansfield, in the same country, he had lain in a kind of trance, and had been visited by many curious people. After fourteen days, his "sorrows and troubles began to wear off," and he "saw into that which was without end," for he had been "brought through the very ocean of darkness and death." So, after this preparation, he came back again to the world of realities, and saw "the harvest white, and the seed of God lying thick in the ground."

Next year, 1648, he came again to Mansfield and the neighbouring towns, and had great meetings; in 1649, he was laid in his first imprisonment in Nottingham gaol, being committed as "a youth" of no given name. He was then in his twenty-fifth year. As soon as he came out of prison, he was beaten and put in the stocks at Mansfield Woodhouse. At Derby, in 1650, he was first called a Quaker by Justice Bennett because he bid the justices

“tremble at the Word of the Lord.” A year later, he was back in Mansfield again, after having lain nearly twelve months in Derby gaol. All 1652 he spent in Yorkshire and among the Dales, had his memorable meeting in Firbank Chapel, and first made his acquaintance with the Fells of Swarthmore, afterwards to be so closely bound up in his life. He now sent out his band of twenty-five preachers, and began a systematic visitation of almost every part of the country, beginning with the North.

Travelling up and down through Westmoreland and Cumberland, Fox continued preaching, sometimes for three hours on end, in farm-houses, in fields, under trees, in churches and on the bare mountain side. He was frequently driven out with clubs, staves and poles, and would often have fared much worse had it not been for the humane and powerful Judge Fell, who interposed several times with the practical argument that to arrest so popular a preacher as he had become, on insufficient evidence, tended to encourage riots. At length, he came to Carlisle, and after being willingly heard by the soldiers garrisoning William Rufus's hoary fortress, and by the country people

gathered in the market place, and having held a "very quiet meeting" in the house of one of the officers, he was sent for to the Town Hall, and committed to prison as a "blasphemer, heretic and seducer."

Whilst he lay there, waiting for the assizes, sometimes singing a hymn so loud inside his window as to drown a fiddler who had been incited to play beneath it to annoy him; sometimes partaking of the simple meal which a gentle and sympathetic lady, Mrs. Benson, wife of one of the magistrates who had condemned him, brought to his prison bars and partook of with him, our young friend from Retford, "a little lad of about sixteen years of age, came to see me," as Fox briefly writes in his Journal. To have travelled more than 150 miles, on foot, for the sake of a few minutes' conversation with a man of whom he had only heard, shows how in earnest the lad was to be sure he was really on the right path, and how persuaded he felt that among the Friends alone, of all people, he could find that for which he sought.

What passed between the two, how many times he was allowed to see Fox, how in the first place he obtained permission to speak to him at

all, we do not know. Sewel, the historian, tells us only the bare fact, and Parnell himself gives the vaguest account, never mentioning Fox's name at all. "I was called for to visit some friends in the North part of England, with whom I had union in spirit before I saw their faces, and afterwards I returned back to my outward dwelling-place." This use of the word "outward," is habitual with him, as distinguishing his temporary abode from that of his soul's abidance.

From the time of their first meeting, his whole heart seems to have gone out to "George," whom he looked upon and loved with a deep and loyal attachment. Nothing is more characteristic of Fox's simplicity than the way in which Parnell, Howgill, Hubberthorn and the other young Quakers, thus speak of him. There was to be no distance between them, but as a younger to an elder brother, he was "George" simply, in their letters one to another.

So the lad became a settled and convinced Friend. Before two years he again sought out his brother, and was present with him at the memorable meeting at Atherstone, in Warwickshire, when Fox stood on a high stool with his

back against the churchyard wall, arguing with, and preaching for hours to, eight clergymen, one of them Nathaniel Stephens, the vicar of his native parish, whom he had known from a child. Fox was then about thirty, a man of settled convictions, with the new society, its discipline and elaborate organisation for philanthropic and communal work, already definitely shaping in his mind.

CHAPTER III.

VISITS CAMBRIDGE.

WHILE Parnell had been seeking and finding, and Fox travelling from end to end of England to preach his gospel, the country had been convulsed by wars and revolution. Charles Stewart had atoned for his misdoings by a death full of dignity ; Oliver had been proclaimed Protector (December, 1653) ; the Parliament had abolished the Prayer Book and the Star Chamber, executed Laud, and appointed an Assembly of Divines to advise upon Church constitution. The royalist clergy were sequestered, and the benefices of the country given over to the Puritan or Presbyterian parsons. Episcopal power was temporarily broken and eclipsed. But things were no easier for the Quakers. Champion of the people's liberties as Cromwell was, the Quakers' sufferings under his government were as severe as the treatment he

afforded to individual Friends, when they appeared personally before him, was kind. Yet, it is strange to remember, that the very men now in the seat of authority were in their turn dispossessed at the Restoration, and themselves suffered infinite hardships and loss for the same freedom of conscience which they now denied to Fox and his band of preachers.

As Oxford had been the stronghold of Royalists and the great upholder of the monarchy, so, in an almost similar degree, the sister University had favoured the Parliament. In ecclesiastical matters, Cambridge had long been solidly for reform. The Fellows of Caius had carried on a long and tedious animosity against their Master and founder, Dr. Caius, on a wrongful suspicion of popish leanings. From Sir Walter Mildmay's recently founded College of Emanuel was emanating a body of young puritan divines who were to settle over the Eastern Counties, and to find their way across the sea to New England. There, in the name of religion and of loyalty to the motherland, they soon combined to inflict on the unfortunate Quakers who had fled from persecution in England, a more cruel treatment than had ever been experienced at home. The

rancour of religious fanaticism was never more rife than now in the puritan seat of learning.

Missionary fervour had already begun working in James's heart, and he had not long parted from Fox in Leicestershire when he became aware that he must set out to visit "a place about fifteen miles southward," possibly Newark. Arrived there, he was "moved" to go on to Cambridge, for he had heard of strange sufferings and persecutions of Friends in that town. A few months earlier, in December, 1653, a couple of harmless women had been publicly stripped to the waist and flogged at the whipping post in the market-place till the blood ran down their bodies, by order of William Pickering, the Mayor. The younger of the two, Mary Fisher, a single woman, then aged about thirty, born in Yorkshire, had already spent sixteen months in York Castle for having addressed a congregation at Selby. She became a great missionary evangelist, visiting the West Indies, New England, Syria, Italy, and Constantinople. At Cambridge her offence was preaching in front of Sidney Sussex College. When the undergraduates whom she was addressing began to mock and deride her, she had called their college "a nest of un-



EAST RETFORD CHURCH, FROM THE SOUTH-WEST.

clean birds." This speech so rankled in the minds of the wild young college lads, that even five or six years after, they sufficiently proved the truth of her description by throwing dirt and stones at any Quakers who passed them in the street; bursting into the meetings "like wild horses"; and throwing mud and stones at the preachers, or tearing off the women's head-gear with unwarrantable and unmannerly rudeness, unproved even by the proctor or senior Fellows, who sometimes were witnesses. The very year after this, in 1655, when George Fox rode through the turbulent crowd of young men, who, he says, were there to be apprenticed to their trade of preaching, his comment on their manners is that "carters and coalers could never be ruder." Had it not been for the friendly twilight and the protection of the new Mayor, who took him to his own house, Fox says he would be like to have needed no supper, for the scholars would have made a supper of him.

To Cambridge, then, James pluckily proceeded, "to see what the Lord had for me to do . . . and he that called me went along with me." He soon heard that at least one Friend, Ann Blakely, wife of a justice of the peace for Cam-

bridgeshire, was in prison, and he set to work in the surest way to become a companion in bonds. Like all these first Quakers, men and women too, he was absolutely regardless of personal safety, comfort or convenience.

Within a fortnight after his arrival in the University town, this young reformer had launched two papers, probably printed broadsides, against the "corruption" of magistrates and of priests, which he proceeded to "set up" in the market-place of Cambridge, upon market day, the busiest in all the week.

They were not aimed particularly against Cambridge magistrates or priests, but against "corrupt ones wheresoever they are."

Now, in the interests of decency and order, such rank heresy on the part of an unknown youth could not be suffered, and on 4th July he was ordered off to gaol by William Pickering, the Mayor. Pending an inquiry, this was, of course, fair enough, but magistrates when they found no precise breach of any law, were apt to let an unfortunate prisoner lie forgotten from sessions to sessions. In his reply to the mittimus, Parnell, who had ever a ready answer, says he was "bound to good behaviour by a

stronger bond than man can make, before ever he came to Cambridge." The Mayor was still further incensed by the arrival of other Friends, and at the end of August, Richard Hubberthorn became Parnell's companion in gaol.

For six months—"two sessions"—Parnell was kept in confinement, tossed, he says, from prison to dungeon, because no actual breach of any law could be proved against him. At last, a jury was summoned to say that the papers he had issued were "seditious and scandalous." The twelve true men, after two hours' deliberation, declared by their foreman that they could find nothing save that the papers were written by James Parnell. And this was quite absurd, for as the accused youth says, he had openly owned them in court, and moreover there was his name upon them, to testify to the same. So, after three days, he was allowed to go away, with a pass describing him as a rogue and vagabond. But his exit from the town where learning and good manners were intended to be taught, was attended by a furious mob, armed with clubs and staves. In the commotion, he was unable to study the paper until he had shaken off his unwelcome

escort, three miles outside Cambridge, at a village where he was thankful to rest for the night. There he found how he had been stigmatised.

Next day, a kindly justice, probably James Blakely, whose own wife had cast in her lot with these persistent people, rode out after the fugitive, witnessed the pass to be a false description, and carried it back to Cambridge, providing, no doubt, in exchange, a substitute with a truer and more polite appellation.

This little friendly act perhaps convinced young Parnell that all the magistrates were not necessarily "corrupt."

CHAPTER IV.

AT ELY AND SOHAM.

PURSUING his itinerary, Parnell found himself on 30th March, 1655, at Fenny-Stanton, a small town on the borders of Huntingdonshire and Cambridgeshire. Here he called together some neighbours in the house of a Mr. Ashen, and was preaching "as moved by the spirit of truth," when a Baptist pastor, Richard Elligood came in. This was an interruption courted by James himself, for he had already despatched a paper of forty-three queries to the Baptists of the place, inviting them to come and answer it publicly. These zealous propagandists conducted their work very openly and boldly, and the practice of putting questions in the form of a catechism, and then arguing against the replies, was a favourite one with James. The paper, he tells us, had been read in the Baptist congregation.

Elligood listened awhile, and, at a suitable opening, rose and somewhat elaborately began, "Sir, if you please, I will speak something to what you have said." This excess of ceremony young Parnell waived bluntly aside with "Here needs no compliments." Flowers of speech, savouring of worldly insincerity, were not for the followers of unvarnished truth.

A discussion on "the letter and the spirit" then followed, with much plain speaking on both sides, in which, according to the custom of the times, "liar and deceiver" were terms freely bandied about. Then an old man, named Philips, rose and informed this irrepressible young stranger that most of those present knew the first principles of religion before he was born, asseverating the truth of his belief "as he lived and breathed." This pained Parnell deeply, for it savoured of an oath; it also provided him with another ground of accusation against his opponents. The meeting at length broke up, but it was not the last of the matter, for several disputatious letters were afterwards exchanged, which are to be found printed in the collection of Parnell's writings.

A month later, in April, he was invited by

Mr. Hind, a tanner, of Cambridge, to a public dispute with the Baptists there. Hind had obtained a promise from Joseph Doughty, a Baptist pastor, that he would be present and answer the young Quaker, if he received the questions three days before the meeting ; if arguments should be short ; censorious, rash and judging terms be avoided ; and a person on each side be appointed to see that order was observed. Parnell agreed to these very appropriate conditions, and suggested the Town Hall for the place of dispute.

On the 20th April, the day fixed, he and his supporters adjourned to the tanner's own house, which Mrs. Hind, the tanner's wife, fiercely resented, and finally drove them outside into the yard. There a crowd of rude people and noisy undergraduates made so much uproar, that Parnell betook himself to a Friend's house near by. At last, he was sent for to the Shire Hall in the Castle yard, where the Baptists were waiting, "sitting upon the Bench like judges." Mr. Doughty, Mr. Rix, a brewer, and one of the Independents, and a great number of university men and clergy, were present. When he had received permission from the

gaoler or custodian, Parnell pulled out the paper of questions and began to speak to the first. Doughty was not satisfied with his answer, and appealed to the "gentlemen of Divinity" in the audience if it could be admitted. When Parnell had repeated his argument, which he says "some of the scholars had so much understanding as to receive it for an answer," Doughty brushed it aside as not pertinent, and evaded the question. Then the gaoler said the dispute must stop. Doughty, before he left, called to him not to let Parnell speak to the people after he had gone, lest he should seduce them. This started a fresh argument, and finally the meeting broke up in disorder, Parnell being hustled out into the Castle yard, and thence, accompanied by a wild crew of undergraduates, to a house, "where I got shut of those caterpillars."

About a fortnight after, Parnell had another dispute with Baptist elders in an orchard at Littleport, in the Isle of Ely. Pastor John Ray, of Wickenbrook, in Suffolk, had travelled thither to "excommunicate" two of his congregation, Samuel and Ezekiel Cater, who had been elders and were now among the Quakers.

Ray preached the same day, or the next, in the church ; Parnell followed him, and spoke when he had done ; he says, probably with some exaggeration, that Ray was routed out of the pulpit and fled from his flock. Then Parnell mounted a grave in the churchyard, preached long to the people, and "cleared his conscience," and came away. But next day the two met again in discussion.


A meeting of the Baptists was being held in a house not far away, to which Parnell, when he heard of it, repaired. Ray was speaking as he stole in at the open door, but at once stopped and bade him begone. "Is thy spirit bound ?" said Parnell. The meeting became disturbed, and a Baptist elder endeavoured to eject the young man from the house. Upon the urgent request of the house-mistress, he immediately departed, for to women he seems to have been invariably considerate and gentle.

From Littleport, Parnell came southward to Ely, the small old-world cathedral town, clustered around its soaring minster, set on a height overlooking the sleepy river and the flat fenland. Here he had great meetings, and before he left, saw "about sixty brought to meet together alone

in the town." He was moved to go into one of the churches, but was not allowed to speak. The town, he writes to Burrough and Howgill, his young contemporaries, not many years older than himself, "is hardened against the Truth," yet he sees a further work to be done in it.

When he had completed his errand in Ely, Parnell passed southwards along the great main road to Soham, a village some three miles from Chippenham, "Colonel Russell's place," as he remarks in his letter. Sir Francis Russell was a useful friend, for his daughter had already married the Protector's son, Henry, and his son and successor, Sir John Russell, shortly afterwards became the most devoted husband of Frances Cromwell, Oliver's youngest daughter.

A number of the household at Chippenham came to Parnell's meeting in Soham, on this Sunday in the middle of May, 1655. A Cambridgeshire justice of the Peace, Robert Hammond, warned him to pass on quietly after he had held his meeting, but he was not satisfied without visiting Soham church, where a "much painted" preacher from London was in the pulpit. He was suffered to speak, and listened



to, passing out to continue his address among the tombs in the churchyard, where, he says, the great throng of people, "without ever touching him, stood even like lambs." Next morning, a warrant came from Hammond, and he was marched off to Cambridge gaol as a disturber of the peace. But his former friend, the good Alderman Blakely, again came to his rescue, and, to Parnell's surprise, for he would have scorned to make an appeal for help, sent of his own accord a warrant for the prisoner's release. Next day he was again hard at work preaching in a village six miles away. "My sudden releasement and going into the country proved very serviceable, for the heathen were much exalted, and rejoiced at my imprisonment." They are busy plotting to shut him up in prison again, he says, yet concludes his letter with an intimation that he will shortly "pass back into those parts where he was taken, for there is a people there to be brought forth."

And now, leaving our young preacher resting for the moment, before gathering his forces to transfer them to the sphere of our own county of Essex, as yet virgin soil, untrodden by the

foot of any Quaker, we may pause to review some aspects of the message that he carried as well as his methods of carrying it.

To take the last first : as regards the speaking in churches. It is not to be supposed that Fox and his followers made a point of systematically going into churches during service time for the object of interrupting the worship of those engaged in it. Once or twice, as at Nottingham in 1648, when Fox was quite a young man, and acknowledges the interruption, it doubtless happened. But on other occasions, he was asked to preach at the close of the sermon, sometimes even the bells were rung to call the people to hear him. Moreover, it was by no means unusual for the Presbyterian minister to invite his hearers to answer him, or if he saw any he knew to be Quakers present, to address a question to them by name. To speak in reply, at the close of the sermon, was strictly legal, and in accordance with the proprieties of the times, and acknowledged by the Presbyterian ministers themselves to be so. After the Restoration, when the suspended dominance of the Church of England was re-established by law, it was never again attempted by the

Friends, the practice having then become illegal. It was, as everyone knows, one of the first distinctions of members of the Society to acquaint themselves clearly with the law of the land, and, as good citizens, to obey it. But where the law was construed against them, no one could be more valiant and pugnacious in defying those who so perverted it.

For Parnell's message, it was one of uncompromising purity. That there must be no traffic with uncleanness in life, in heart, in doctrine, was his watchword. Empty the brain of man-made intervention, and let the Light of God shine in. Only when the soul is transparent, can it be filled with immediate inspiration.

His was the task to carry the evangel of a return to Christ's simple teaching, to the emphatic and immediate presence of the Holy Spirit, before whom all men were equal. Others might build up the church, and impose such simple regulations of conduct as seemed necessary; he, by his tongue and pen, and by his heroic death when these were silenced, was the forerunner to startle and awaken Christians from their dull acceptance of formal and cold and empty observances.

CHAPTER V.

INTRODUCES QUAKERISM INTO ESSEX.

THE county of Essex has occupied a place in the annals of evangelical Nonconformity second to no other in the kingdom. Wycliffe's followers here were numbered by scores, and the first Wycliffian martyr was an Essex man. From 1402, when John Becket, of Pattiswick, suffered for his Protestantism, down to the death of Queen Mary, in 1558, a constant succession of Essex martyrs were hanged or burned at Smithfield, at Steeple Bumpstead, Coggeshall, Braintree, Maldon, Brentwood, Rayleigh, Horndon-on-the-Hill, Harwich, Manningtree, Rochford, and several other places in the county, for their belief in an open Bible. The Martyrs' Memorial (see illustration), designed by Mr. John Belcher, A.R.A., President of the Royal Institute of British Architects, and erected by *Samuel F. Hurnard, J.P.*, in 1903, in the new



by

W. Gill.

MARTYRS' MEMORIAL, COLCHESTER TOWN HALL.

Town Hall at Colchester, records upon its pure white marble tablet, the names of twenty-six men and women, who, in that town, laid down their lives for the faith that was in them. Among these names stand those of James Parnell and Edward Grant, an old man, who was so roughly beaten by soldiers when driven out of meeting, that he died from the blows only two years after the young pioneer, whom he had succoured in prison.

After the Reformation, Essex became a fertile soil for Puritan opinions to grow in, so that when the Restoration placed king and church once more in their ancient ascendancy, more than one hundred ministers in the county, or a twentieth part of the whole number for England, were ejected from their livings on St. Bartholomew's Day, because they refused to take the oath of Uniformity (1662).

In this county, therefore, our young friend, on his arrival, found a ready and prepared field for his work. We must never forget that, though Fox had been seven years lighting the torch of Quakerism in other counties, Parnell was the first of all his followers to visit Essex. Fox himself did not arrive here till two or three months later.

In the summer of 1655, Parnell passed from Cambridgeshire into the north of Essex. During the whole of the month of June, he was moving about, preaching at Stebbing, Felsted, Halstead, Witham and many other places near.

At Halstead he was made welcome at the house of John Isaacs, a tanner ; at Witham, John Freeborn, baymaker, was inclined to receive him ; at Felsted, John Child and his wife, Ann ; John Chopping ; Mary Brady and many others, soon adopted his teaching, and it was not long before they all proved their earnestness by lying in gaol in Colchester Castle, rather than turn back to their former ways.

James passed on to Colchester, where he met several sympathetic inquirers at the house of Thomas Shortland, a weaver, afterwards to become to him a true friend, faithful to death. Now the first Friends' meeting in Colchester was soon formed in Shortland's house, the earliest members being Stephen Crisp ; Thomas Bales, a grocer ; and George Weatherly, a malster, with others not named.

On Sunday, the 4th of July, 1655, this earnest young preacher of eighteen passed a remarkable day of strenuous service, the arduous


character of which would try the spirit even of a full-grown and seasoned man. But Parnell, we must remember, was a beardless youth, and, moreover, deficient in physical strength. He was at an age when a lad of our own time, would be only preparing for the serious work of life.

Yet we see how his very weakness and undevelopment had become instruments for the better unravelling of the divine purpose, and his single-hearted idealism, his simple dependence on revelation, bore witness to the power of the Holy Spirit that animated him.

The morning of that Sunday was passed by young Parnell at his lodgings at Thomas Shortland's house, where all who would, might come to confer with and hear him. Then he passed down the High Street to St. Nicholas Church, where, when the sermon was ended, he was suffered to speak to the congregation. In the afternoon, he addressed a very great meeting, of about a thousand people, in John Furly's yard, he being mounted above the crowd, and speaking out of a hay-chamber window. Can we not picture the lad, his dale and somewhat sickly appearance heightened by his sober attire ;

insignificant and youthful in figure, so that he had already earned the derisive name of "the quaking boy," yet with a soul of fire and a burning courage which carried him through every obstacle, and made even persecution welcome for the Truth's sake. In the crowd would be many by no means sympathetic listeners, noisy and rough interruptions would try his temper and nerve; and he who could meekly take a blow, jeeringly inflicted, "for Christ's sake," could, as we know, flame into righteous anger and fierce invective, when he was defending the divine right of conscience, or pointing out the hypocrisy of his opponents. But he never lost courage; he looked for strength outside himself; and even after these exhausting experiences, he was fit to appear in the evening at a previously advertised meeting held in the schoolroom for the children of the French and Flemish weavers, to which John Furly's house then hospitably afforded an asylum.

Colchester had long been a principal seat of the bay and say-making industry of the Flemish and French weavers, who had been driven by the Duke of Alva's persecutions from Flanders. The town had been torn by rival factions



during the Civil War, and was only now recovering from the terrible siege of seven years before. It was strongly Protestant and, under the Parliamentary ordinance, had appointed a town lecturer to supplement the religious efforts of the incumbents of its churches. William Archer, who held the post, and Thomas Tillam, a Seventh-day Baptist, who had come into the county from Northumberland, were arraigned against Parnell in the French School, and no doubt put him unsparingly through an inquisitorial ordeal.

This was no light day's work for a young man of eighteen, utterly untrained for public speaking. However, his spiritual experience was fast out-running his youth. Among those who went to hear him was Steven Crisp, a wealthy and worthy Colchester citizen, a bay maker, who had married a Dutch wife from Amsterdam, and was much respected in the town. He was so "effectually reached" by the young man's preaching that he at once became one of the Friends, and, indeed, to Parnell himself, a most faithful and very necessary friend, as events will show. Not all the people heard him gladly by any means, and Crisp, from whom

we have the account of his doings, relates how as he came out of St. Nicholas Church, a Colcestrian struck Parnell with a great staff, and bade him "take that for Jesus Christ's sake." If the smiter thought to rouse the young man to anger, he was mistaken, for Crisp tells us he was "a pattern of patience and meekness," and only replied gently, "Friend, I do receive it for Jesus Christ's sake."

Ten days were spent in Colchester, and on the 12th of July, Parnell went back to Coggeshall, to his final appearance as a gospel preacher, and to his last days of liberty.

CHAPTER VI.

THE END OF ACTIVE SERVICE.

THE picturesque little town of Coggeshall, twenty miles north of the county town, upon one of the main high roads from thence to Colchester, has as distinctive a character as any in the county of Essex. Still nearly three miles from a railway station, it has long fallen behind in the race of modern life, and has yet kept many of its most interesting features. But in the seventeenth century it was a busy manufacturing place, resounding with the hum of weavers' looms, and redolent of the tanners' dyes. Its seventeenth century house-fronts, with finely carved gables and barge-boards, betoken a number of wealthy inhabitants, and its magnificent church of St. Peter-ad-Vincula is a relic of far earlier times.

Of the ancient abbey church little now remains ; but the echoes of the Reformation still

linger in the place, which, upon two horrible consecutive days in July, 1555, saw the fires of Bonner lighted for the burning of two innocent martyrs, one a gentleman in the service of the Earl of Oxford, of Hedingham Castle, Thomas Hawkes by name. The holocaust took place by permission, and in the presence, of Queen Mary's Chancellor, Lord Rich, who afterwards, when his next Queen, Elizabeth, desired other methods, found it easy to compound with conscience by founding the famous school, as well as almshouses for old people, at Felsted, where he intended to be buried; near by his mansion of Leighs Priory. The second martyr was not a Coggeshall native; a third, William Flower, who had been a school-master in Coggeshall, had been led to the stake in St. Margaret's Churchyard, Westminster, a couple of months before. No wonder Coggeshall was strongly Protestant.

Precisely a hundred years had passed since then, when young Parnell arrived in the town, to find that a special fast day of public humiliation and prayer was arranged to be held on Sunday, the 12th July, of which notice had been given in the church on the previous sabbath. If, as






Photo by

GREAT COGGESHALL CHURCH, ESSEX.

W. Gill.


Parnell says, in his "Fruits of a Fast," it was also announced that special prayer would be offered against the errors of the Quakers, and "for the returning of them who owned them," it is sufficient proof of the extraordinary effect James's preaching had achieved, although he had been only a few weeks in the neighbourhood. For, as we have already said, there is no record of any earlier labourer.

But these fast days, and days of humiliation, were frequently proclaimed under the Protector, and by the Parliament, who now occupied the position of chief authority in all matters of religion. During the sitting of the Long Parliament, weekly, and sometimes daily, sermons were preached in St. Margaret's church, by Stephen Marshall, Matthew Newcomen, John Owen and others. These three divines were Essex men, who had occupied respectively the livings of Finchingfield, Dedham and Coggeshall. At this time, Owen had left Coggeshall, and was settled at Oxford, where he had been nominated by Cromwell as Chancellor of the University, and Dean of Christ Church.

The vicar of Coggeshall, when Parnell came in July, 1655, was John Samms, who had not

long since removed there from Kelvedon. He was one of the assistants, or "triers," of the commission appointed by Parliament a year before, to remove "scandalous and insufficient ministers." The preacher for the day was John Willis, an Independent, of Braintree, who had come over to assist.

The little preaching Quaker was already well known by sight in the town, and as he wended his way, on this hot July noonday, up the broad Church Street, seeking, perhaps, the shade of the high gabled houses as he went, a number of small boys and children gathered in his train. When he reached the church porch they would have noisily flocked in after him. But the last thing that James desired was to make a disorder, and he bade them go in first. Presently, he followed, "very orderly." He stood, without speaking, until the preacher ended, and was coming down from the pulpit. Then he opened his mouth; quoting first of all Paul's words: "This is the order of the true church that all may speak one by one, and if anything be revealed to him that stands by, let the first hold his peace." He was proceeding, when Samms and others interrupted



him, "so that it bred much confusion." However, he was allowed a short hearing, before Mr. Willis got up and impatiently told him he was talking nothing but nonsense. Parnell fetched out his Bible, and began to read the first chapter of Thessalonians, and then to preach from it.

Then another minister present, John Stalham, a Congregationalist from Terling, broke in, accusing Parnell of uttering lies and slanders. The magistrates present called to him to put off his hat, an unfailing resource when nothing else could be objected against these ready-witted Quakers. Parnell seized his opportunity, and retorted that the priest wore a cap and what was the difference? Could there be any less religion in keeping a hat on his head, for which end it was made, than a shoe on his foot, or a glove on his hand? This he followed up with an expression of his determination to reverence no man's person, be he priest or magistrate.

The very essence of his religion, as we know, was opposed to the system of a human priesthood, as such, in every way. Fox and all his disciples denied that any one race or body of men could arrogate to themselves the sole

right to purvey spiritual food to the people. They maintained from first to last that something more than a college education, degrees, licence, or ordination was necessary to fit a man to preach the true gospel. "I also," says Parnell, boldly, "am made a minister of the power of God, by which I am made able and continued [or carried on] to declare it openly and publicly."

Service was not ended, but Parnell, not being in unison with, or "conformable" to, the prayers, resumed possession of his hat and passed out. It was not his fault if a number of persons, whom as he says, he did not beckon or call, and of whom he knew nothing, followed him. Yet this was afterwards made an accusation against him by the magistrates, who protested he invited them to come out and listen to him outside.

He passed quietly down the street towards the friend's house where he had been silently sitting in prayer before he went to the church. It was, I believe, that of Robert Ludgater, a fellmonger of the town. The people followed, and before he had gone far, Dionysius Wakering, of Church Hall, Kelvedon, a justice of the

peace and a member of Parliament for the county, who had been at the service, hurried through the crowd, and clapping the young man on the back, said he arrested him in the name of the Protector.

Parnell turned round and quietly asked, "Where is thy writ?" This excited the people, who knew, of course, that without a writ no Englishman could be thus summarily packed off to prison. However, a writ was easily procured; the same day, James was lodged in Colchester Castle, the common gaol for the county, under a mittimus signed by four magistrates, viz., Herbert Pelham, of Bures Hamlet; Thomas Cook, of Pebmarsh; Dionysius Wakering, and William Harlackenden of Earls Colne Priory, some three miles from Coggeshall.

The heads of the indictments against him were, that he riotously entered the church at Coggeshall, stood up and told the minister he blasphemed and spoke falsely, with other reproachful words; went out into the common highway with a great number of his followers, and gave out menacing and threatening speech tending to the breach of the peace and against law; that he gave no good account of his settle-

ment, life and conversation, and was an idle, disorderly person. Unless he found able sureties to be bound by recognisance or his personal appearance at the next assizes, he was ordered to remain in gaol.

So he was kept close in Colchester Castle, but allowed pen and paper, with which he wrote an answer to the mis-statements contained in the mittimus. Before the end of July, George Whitehead and Richard Clayton, who had met travelling in Suffolk, came together to see him, and found him "well and comforted."

In September, he was marched off to Chelmsford to the assizes, being chained to five felons and murderers, for the dismal procession along the twenty miles of straight road, through the towns of Coggeshall and Braintree.

The judge, who arrived in the county town on a Saturday, and on Monday morning proceeded to try the prisoners, was Roger Hill, who had been made a sergeant-at-law, by Cromwell, only a month or two earlier. He had been a counsel employed against Laud, and had sat in the Long Parliament. He had married a widow of Assington Hall, Suffolk, and his third

wife was an Essex lady, who brought him an estate at Aldborough Hatch.

Parnell was detached from his fellow-prisoners, and brought in before the judge with manacles on his hands, against which the people in court cried shame. He was dismissed till the next afternoon, and then, as a concession to popular feeling, brought up without any irons at all.

The gaoler removed the hat that Parnell would not doff in reverence to the judge, and cast it upon the floor.

A clerk read the indictment, and Parnell pleaded not guilty. Then witnesses were called, Mr. Willis, the Braintree Independent, two justices of the peace, Wakering and another, and a couple of other men. Then the reply that Parnell had written, and another paper which, judging from its title, "The Idol's Temple and the Deceiver therein," was not likely to pacify the four clergymen who were appearing against him, were put in. The judge summed up, as Parnell thought, with a great lack of impartiality, even going so far, he says, as to tell the jury what finding they should make. However, they charged him with nothing save authorship of the two papers,

which he had already owned in court. But the judge fined him about £40 in two amounts, one for contempt of the magistrates, the other for contempt of the ministry. Of course, Parnell would not pay one penny, which as he says in a letter written from prison to the judge, would be as much as if he paid the whole fine, and to own himself guilty where he was not.

He was conveyed back to Colchester, and admitted again within the massive castle walls.* No "giddy-headed people" by which curious misnomer Judge Hill described the staid and serious followers of Fox, were to be permitted access to him in prison. He was allowed pen, ink and paper, and soon busied himself in writing more "Queries," a copy of which he sent to each of the clergymen who had been concerned in his conviction: John Samms, William Sparrow, John Willis and John Stalham. He also wrote letters to the Independents, and the Quakers, of Essex, with a detailed account of his conversion, imprisonment and trial, all of which were published together as "The Fruits of a Fast," a year after his death.

* Then the County Gaol. Reported on by John Howard in his "State of the Prisons," 4th ed., 1792, p. 261.

CHAPTER VII.

IMPRISONMENT AND DEATH.

THE Castle of the walled town of Colchester, the oldest and most important borough in the Eastern counties, was built by Eudo of Normandy, dapifer, or Mayor, of the palace, to William the Conqueror. Much land was granted to Eudo in the county, and here, upon the site of an ancient Roman temple, dedicated to the Emperor Claudius, in whose reign the first Roman Colony in Britain was founded here, he reared his stately castle. Although some considerable part has disappeared, the outer walls and a portion of the interior remain intact. Within is housed a valuable and interesting museum, and the Castle, it is not surprising to find, is daily visited by numbers of persons from far and near.

Among the chief objects of interest pointed out in the Castle itself are the cells where prisoners were confined. James Parnell's

narrow, close-walled cell has been the goal of many pilgrims from America and all parts of this country for 250 years.

Upon his return thither from the forlorn journey to Chelmsford, after the miserable pretence at a fair trial, Parnell was abandoned to the mercy of the castle gaoler, Nicholas Roberts, a most vindictive and cruel man, married to an unfeeling and coarse woman as his wife. Nothing that this couple could do to deprive and annoy the poor youth was left undone. A trundle bed supplied by his friends, was never allowed to reach him, and he was compelled to lie night after night upon cold stones, which were often running with water.

The first few weeks of his imprisonment were probably passed in one of the two large dungeons in the South-eastern tower of the castle, where afterwards so many Friends were brought from all parts of Essex, to spend weary months and often years. The doorway leading to these dungeons forms one of our illustrations, from a drawing by Ernest Poppy, in the possession of Wilson Marriage, of Colchester. The chambers remain almost exactly in their former position. In the oak floors are massive rings






Photo by

and chains, to which the unfortunate prisoners were attached. A worse instrument of torture, called the press, appears in one. Light can scarcely penetrate through narrow, wedge-shaped slits in walls which are at least ten feet thick. Air is only admitted through the grated doorway that opens on to the inner court, now roofless, but then stifling and darkened by an upper floor.

Our prisoner was forbidden to take exercise on the walls or in the yard of the castle, although this was earnestly craved. On one occasion his plea for air was met by the gaoler locking him outside his cell all night in a close, narrow passage. The photograph opposite shows the walk upon the summit of the Castle wall, leading to the North-West tower; the doorway leads to the cell where Parnell was later on confined.

The embargo which prevented his friends' access to him must have been partially removed before many weeks. George Whitehead, then a young man, afterwards a pillar of the church, came, as we have seen. Although with a grudging consent on the part of the gaoler, Fox also succeeded in seeing him during the late summer or autumn.

It is difficult to fix the exact time, but it was probably late in July, or early in the month of August, that George Fox had arrived in Essex, and had a "glorious meeting" of 2,000 persons at Coggeshall, as he relates in his Journal. Parnell's preaching and arrest there had profoundly stirred the inhabitants, and Fox was ready as ever to follow up the impression. No doubt the direction of his steps toward Essex at this precise time, was the result of his hearing in London, where he had passed part of the summer, of the state of affairs in the county, and of James Parnell's reception.

He arrived in Colchester on the Friday following his Coggeshall meeting, and that day spoke to a large gathering held "near," perhaps at Copford, or Stanway. On Sunday, he had another meeting, still larger. The audience, he tells us, were "turned to Christ's free teaching and received it gladly, for many of them were of the stock of the martyrs."

Fox succeeded in seeing the imprisoned lad, though he was not allowed to stay long in converse with him. Since the two last met, the younger man had passed through deep and ripening experiences. No doubt his reverence

and admiration for his friend were as great, or greater than ever, but he had gained a strength and self-reliance of his own. "Very cruel they were to him," Fox says in his Journal. The gaoler's wife was unreasonable and immoderate, and "threatened to have his blood," though she was not averse to making money out of him, and demanded exorbitant bribes before admitting those who came from Cambridge and London to see him. Some she received with vile language and indecent practical jokes, and sent them away without vouchsafing them a glimpse of their poor young friend. Then an order was stuck up on the door of his room, saying that every one who wished to see him must spend 4d. in beer. Such petty devices were possible.

At Christmas time, he was removed from the small room for which he had paid fourpence a night, to a hole in the castle wall in the southwest tower, some twelve feet above the ground, to which access could only be had by a short ladder reaching but half this height. A piece of rope was provided, by which the prisoner was expected to lower himself till he reached the ladder, when he had to descend for his food.

In this miserable place, without air, or any but the dimmest light, with no possible means of fire or warmth, the poor youth grew ill and sickly, his legs, for want of the much coveted exercise, became numb and useless, and he was soon incapable of performing the daily task—an acrobatic feat even for a sound lad—of descending many feet by a rope to fetch up his food. A basket, fixed upon the end of a cord for him to let down, was supplied by his anxious friends, who must have been heart-broken at seeing him thus gradually sicken and fade away. It was little enough they could do, but even this was refused, and the kind provision was banished. He must either famish in the hole, or drag his stiffening, useless limbs down this perilous descent at the gaoler's pleasure.


One day, the descent had been safely accomplished, and, clutching his bread in one hand, he was climbing the ladder, groping unsteadily for the short dangling rope, when his feeble, nerveless grasp missed it, and, overbalancing, he fell from the top of the ladder upon the hard, cold stones of the dungeon. There he lay unconscious for some time, and when at last the gaoler went his rounds again, he was taken up

for dead. Seeing him to be now unequal to such athletic exercises, the prison keeper mercifully deposited him in a lower and more accessible spot ; another hole in the thick castle wall, which, from its shape and size, had acquired the title of the Oven. " Some baker's ovens," says one of the narrators, " have been seen bigger than this, though not so high." But there was no crevice whereby light and air might enter, or smoke escape. Winter had set in with severity, and a charcoal burner—probably one of those that the Dutch housewife carries about with her, and that are placed before every seat in the churches, was provided by the thoughtful friends. Again this simple necessary was churlishly denied, while even the food supplied by the outside sympathisers was distributed by the gaoler's wife among other prisoners, and never reached the delicate youth for whom it was intended.

Chief among Parnell's benefactors were two wealthy merchants, Thomas Talcot and Edward Grant ; his early friends, Thomas Shortland and his wife, who occupied a more humble position in life, were still more practical in their ministrations. Mrs. Shortland came day by day

to bring food ; her husband, on hearing of the poor lad's bruised and sick condition, offered to " lie body for body " as substitute in prison, until he recovered. Thomas Talcot willingly offered a bond of £40 that, dead or alive, James should be returned to prison in a short time, if he might only remove him to his own house to be nursed. Henry Barrington, the magistrate to whom Talcot made this offer, proposed that application should be made to Dionysius Wakering, the magistrate and Member of Parliament, who had committed Parnell, and thought very likely if he were offered a bond of £100 he would consent ; as for himself he declined to meddle.

Talcot, while protesting he was as free to give a hundred, as a forty, pound bond, was aware of the hopelessness of an appeal in this quarter, and the lad's condition grew daily worse and worse. At the spring assizes, Shortland one evening waylaid the judge as he was leaving the court, and begged him to intervene in the cause of justice that he stood for. But Mr. Justice Richard Aske, of the Inner Temple and Upper Bench, only replied that unless the fine were paid, the prisoner might lie ten years in bonds.



He was the Lord Protector's prisoner, and no one else could set him free. Curiously enough, this judge's death happened almost as soon as the young prisoner's, in June of this same year.

A great many people now came to see this young Quaker, both Friends and others, and we may imagine him, in spite of his failing strength, inspiring them with his own courage, and still valiantly upholding his voice for truth. "Friends are much barred from me, yet not all," he writes. Gerard Roberts, a well known London Friend, came down to talk with him. A compassionate lady, daughter of Henry Barrington, the Colchester magistrate already mentioned, after visiting him, protested that "if this were how the Protector treated his prisoners, it would be better to be anybody's prisoner than his." By March, he had somewhat recovered from his fall, and was able again to use his pen, this time to reply to Henry Glisson, a Colchester doctor, who had accused him of being a disciple of Henry Nicholas, father of the Family of Love, or Familists, and a believer in the sinless state.

As the spring advanced, it was evident to all that the youth was nearing the end of his

physical endurance. But, sustained by his high idealism, and bent on realising in himself first, afterwards in others, what was revealed to him as best and holiest, his spirit never flagged. "It is a land of liberty," he had written to his friends, but "truth and equity, being strangers in it, are persecuted." "I had a time to preach the truth amongst you, now I have a time to seal the same." "I charge you, profess no more than in life you seal; preach the light in your lives and let it shine forth in your conversation."

He was still thinking of the field where he had last laboured, and to William Dewsbury, in prison at Northampton, whose "fatherly care" over him he owned and loved, he wrote that the want of ministers in these parts was an anxiety to him; but "my imprisonment has been very serviceable," he cheerfully adds, and concludes, valiantly, "my strength the Philistines know not."

On 22nd April, his appetite which had long been failing, refused to be stimulated at all, and for ten days he took little save cold water. Two friends were permitted to watch with him at night. On the night of the 4th—5th of May,

he had a sweet sleep for an hour, woke and smiled, and then drew breath no more.

Ann Langley and Thomas Shortland, that faithful friend, were with him to the end, and heard his last faint murmurs, "Thomas, I have seen great things. Do not hold me, let me go." "Dear heart," said the good woman, through her tears, "we will not hold thee."

So he escaped from his cruel bonds at last. But by his tenacity he had done more, even than by his preaching, to advance the Truth. His silent heroism was owned by the Father, working mysteriously through the Holy Spirit, so that in the town of Colchester, before many years had passed, it is estimated that there must have been at least 1,000 Friends in a population not exceeding 8,000.

An inquest was held next day, before John Gale, coroner, as was usual when anyone died in prison. Shortland and Ann Langley were sent for to the Moot Hall to give evidence, while Mrs. Shortland remained at the Castle with the poor lad's body. The jury having proceeded thither to view it, reported that they found it "very spare," and the countenance "gashful, far beyond the usual manner of dead

corpses." After some disagreement among the jury, and a short adjournment, they found through their foreman, Jude Taylor, a Brownist, that James Parnell was guilty of his own death, by wilfully abstaining from food when he might have had it. The monstrous verdict they had first brought in, not, however, being all agreed, was that after his fast was ended, he had over-eaten and so caused his own death.

Either verdict was equally inaccurate, but so great excitement had been created in the town by the case, the lad's youth and his unbreakable resolution, the determined efforts made by his friends for his release, that perhaps a clear judgment was not to be expected. Public feeling was inflamed, too, by a ballad that was sung about the streets describing his "blasphemous life and scandalous death," and by a pamphlet entitled, "A True and Lamentable Relation of the most desperate death of James Parnell, Quaker, who wilfully starved himself," etc., both of which were issued immediately after his death. His friends were by no means silent, and almost as soon appeared in print with "The Lamb's Defence against Lyes," giving a true account of the



Photo by

INTERIOR OF THE QUADRANGLE.
(Parnell's Cell in the angle.)

W. Gill.

manner of his last hours, and repudiating the false accusations cast upon their dead friend. Already enshrined in their affections as a hero, he was now surrounded with the halo of a martyred saint.

The climax of their grief arrived when they were forbidden to take away his body, and bury it decently after their own fashion.* Instead of this, it was huddled away into an unknown grave in the castleyard. Probably the authorities, knowing how excited was public feeling, and how numerous the Quakers had become, feared a demonstration on the part of the townspeople, which would have been very awkward for them.

Thus pitilessly ended a young life, full of promise, beginning to ripen for rich fruit, and already showing signs of a most useful future. But the lesson of James Parnell's death was not forgotten, and for us is still full of fruitful inspiration.

* Within four years, they were in possession of a graveyard in Moor Elms Lane, St. Botolph's Parish. See "Crisp and his Correspondents," 1892, p. 49.

CHAPTER VIII.


AUTHORSHIP.

NOT two years after he had thrown in his lot with Fox and the Friends, young Parnell, then in his seventeenth year, began to use his pen in their behalf.

His first published work, "A Trial of Faith," of something less than ten quarto pages in length, was an impassioned appeal to his readers to see what they trust in. "Come, try your Faith, all you Professors of godliness," it begins, "come search the ground and bottom of your Faith, what it is built upon." This short pamphlet is full of eloquence, its sentences are polished, its language picturesque and imaginative. Already the young author had advanced far in the realisation of that doctrine of the inner light of reason and conscience, "the messenger of God," which had come to Fox with such amazing vitality out of the depths of his own experience.

“Hearken,” says Parnell, “to that in your consciences, which raiseth up desires after righteousness. . . . If you be guided by it, you shall find a Teacher continually present; thou shalt need no man to teach thee, but it will be a Teacher unto thee, teaching and directing in righteousness, purity and holiness. And if thou art diligent, keeping thy mind within, with an ear open to the pure voice, thou shalt find it present with thee wheresoever thou art; in the fields, in thy bed, in markets, in company, when thy outward priest or teacher is absent (it may be in the ale house, or at his pleasures and delights, or far off), and will check thee and condemn thee for that which no outward eye can see, and will . . . purify thy heart and make it a fit Temple for purity to dwell in.” Then, anticipating Penn, who did not write his famous treatise till fifteen years later, he sums up: “So there is no obtaining of Life but through Death, nor no obtaining the Crown but through the Cross.”

This little book met with so cordial a reception on its appearance in 1654, that Giles Calvert, the well-known Quaker printer, “at the Black Spread Eagle at the west end of Pauls,” was



called upon to reprint it twice during the following year, and again four years after (1658). It became so much read and asked for, that it was even translated into Dutch, French and German, all within a few years. This interest we may clearly attribute to the foreign colony settled in Colchester, and their constant communication with France, Holland and North Germany. The indignation caused by James' untimely death excited a fresh interest in his life and writings.

His pen, once set in motion, was not idle; and by it, even more than by his preaching (for it reached farther abroad) his name became a familiar sound among the scattered Quakers. Early the next year, he published an Epistle, dated 19th January, 1655; and with Richard Hubberthorn, a small book, written while they were together in Cambridge prison, entitled "The immediate call to the Ministry of the Gospel witnessed by the Spirit," etc., in which they boldly assert the principle that the power of God in preparation, and not years of study and ordination, were needed to make a preacher.

During 1655, his last year of liberty, five


small books issued from his busy pen. To them we must look for the chief indications of his moral and spiritual growth. Combative they all are, for there was a new phase of belief to expound in the face of fierce opposition ; full of passionate invective against formalism and worldliness they are ; instinct with a strenuous upholding of the cause of the poor and the wage-earner which anticipates the democratic spirit of the present time. Beneath the sometimes crude judgments and egoistic assumption, which we can pass over as almost inseparable from extreme youth combined with precocious powers, there is manifestly a deepening purpose and a stronger grip of spiritual experience.

In "Christ exalted into his Throne," the first of these five books, the writer dwells on "the Light which is above the Scripture, else there is jangling and rangling and arguing and disputing, every one with a several judgment upon it." This book also was translated into Dutch.

"The Trumpet of the Lord Blown" begins on a note of pure socialism, inveighing against all who are called master and sir, and mistress and madam, because of their gay clothing and


"much earth." With more than Puritan contempt, this youth, cast off from his comfortable home and respectable middle-class people, rails against the hawking and hunting, bowling, carding and dicing ; the " fine attire, and all manner of new fashings, silk and vilvet, and purple, gold and silver ; you have your waiting men and waiting maids under you to wait upon you, and your coaches to ride ; and your high and lofty horses are like yourselves according to your lofty minds, and you sit at ease Dives-like . . . and your fellow creatures must labour like slaves under you and work for all this ; . . they must hunger and thirst and labour when you are eating and drinking and sleeping ; poor Lazarus lies starving without."

" A Shield of Truth " contains a vindication of the position and doctrines of the Friends, who, at that time, and for long after, were often suspected, persecuted and maligned, out of sheer ignorance of their true aims and objects. Quoting Scripture very ingeniously on all points, he defends the name of Quaker ; the consistent moral standard of their teachers, who are unpaid ; who dress simply and " do



not go in double cuffs and boot-hole tops with great store of points and ribbands” ; who sue no man at law ; covet not the fat things of the world ; who deny not the Scriptures, but claim they must be expounded by the Light of the Holy Ghost ; who own the true Baptism of Christ with the Holy Ghost and with fire ; who do not deny the Supper of the Lord, but recognise it as spiritual and continual ; who hold that the true spirit must be first implanted before acceptable prayer can be uttered ; who, instead of defying magistrates and government for the sake of anarchy, oppose only those who wrest the law aside to their own ends.

There were, as we know, plenty of instances of united action amongst a whole bench of magistrates to imprison, at any price, these troublesome people who somehow always had the last word in argument. There is the word of Richard Farnworth that the Mayor of Cambridge, when he could find no other statute to fit the case, said : “ Very well then, I will make you an idle vagabond and a rogue without occupation.” But Friends had already begun to make themselves so thoroughly conversant with the law, that by the time of the *cause*



célèbre of William Penn and William Mead, at the Old Bailey, 1-5 September, 1670, and the successful efforts to obtain a legal affirmation, it was almost impossible to catch them tripping.

Parnell next gives several pages to explaining why Friends have adopted "thee and thou," and cannot put off their hats. The gist of his argument is that there is nothing in the Bible about it ; which is no argument, being applicable on either side. The real inwardness of his position is that underlying democratic spirit of true gentility, a refusal to render homage to any but spiritual supremacy, to honour any man by inexactly addressing him as several persons, which the early Friends based on Christ's broad humanitarianism and universal brotherhood. Later, as we know, a great reaction in these points set in ; the Society became so rich and respectable, that there was small welcome extended to the poor and humble. Now, however, owing mainly to the Adult School movement, all are invited to enter into fellowship, and are cordially received, whether uneducated or of high intellectual training, of the labouring or leisured classes.

Other points of accusation which Parnell answers pertinently are : that the Quakers say they are perfect ; that they do not believe in the incarnation of Christ, or observe the Sabbath ; that they are one with (1) Ranters and (2) with Papists—the illogical nature of the last two objections is sufficiently obvious. That they “ judge people,” “ justify themselves and condemn all others ” were better founded objections, which only showed the uncompromising spirit of their courage, and the sometimes over-hot zeal with which they combated ritual and ceremonialism.


“ The Watcher ” is a fierce diatribe against formalism, priesthood and pride, coupled with an invitation to come and join “ the children of Light.” Herein is the account of his public debates with the Baptists of Fenstanton, Cambridge and Littleport. All the sects, says Parnell, priests, *i.e.* Anglican clergymen, Baptists, Independents and Presbyterians, are banded together against the “ life and power now manifested in the Lord’s sons and daughters.”

The rest of his writings were penned in Colchester Castle. First in order was the “ Fruits of a Fast,” giving an account of his visit to


Coggeshall and his arrest there—fruits indeed. Then he penned another answer to the Baptists : “ Goliath’s Head cut off,” etc., comparing himself to little David, and replying to a book written by Thomas Ray, a Baptist, of King’s Ripton, Hunts. About Christmas time, 1656, after he had been six months in prison, he wrote a couple of heartening letters to the Friends in Essex, whom he had so quickly gathered and so early left. The Light, “ messenger of God,” is his message ; “ stand in the denial of self and all its ends,” and the Light will lead in singleness to God ; it is your power and strength.

A letter to London Friends is dated 12th January, 1656. An Epistle to Friends generally, without date, but from its allusions to spring probably belonging to a few months later, and the last of his known writings, contains the following beautiful passages of poetic fervour :

“ O, rest not above the Life ; feed upon nothing below it. Follow the Light which leads your minds unto the Sun, for in Him is peace, yea, true peace which cannot be broken ; yea, He is the bond of peace. . . He will refresh you with the heavenly dew, and ye shall flourish as in a summer’s day, as plants of



righteousness. But the spring comes first. O, how beautiful is the spring in a barren field, where barrenness and deadness fly away. As the spring comes on, the winter casts her coat and the summer is nigh. O, wait to see and read these things within. You that have been as barren and dead and dry, without sap ; unto you the Sun of righteousness is risen with healing in his wings and begins to shine in your coasts. For this is a day wherein the Lord is come to visit you. . . O, mind the secret sprigs and tender plants. Now you are called to dress the garden. Let not the weeds and wild plants remain. Peevishness is a weed ; anger is a weed ; self-love and self-will are weeds ; pride is a wild plant ; covetousness is a wild plant ; lightness and vanity are wild plants, and lust is the root of all. And these things have had a room in your gardens, and have been tall and strong ; and truth, innocency and equity have been left out, and could not be found, until the Sun of righteousness arose and searched out that which was lost. Therefore stand not idle but come into the vineyard and work. Your work shall be to watch and keep out the fowls, unclean beasts, wild bears and subtle foxes.



And He that is the Husbandman will pluck up the wild plants and weeds, and make defence about the vines. He will tell you what to do. He who is Father of the vineyard will be nigh you. Read within, or you will stumble. And what is not clear unto you, wait for the fulfilling ; he that believeth, maketh not haste."

CHAPTER IX.

FRIENDS IN ESSEX.


BY the sensational and pathetic death of the young Parnell, Quakerism in Essex received such a startling impetus that before long the Castle cells were crowded with sober decorous prisoners brought from all parts of the county on one pretence or another of breaking the law.

Some of the offences laid to their door were trivial and absurd. A great many, both men and women, were committed for the crime of "speaking to the priest." Either in Church, after service was over, or when they met upon the highway, they invited him to advance scriptural authority in support of his practices.

Not to take an oath was, of course, another of their first principles. Christ has said "Swear not at all," and their literal interpretation of this injunction resulted as we know, in their

obtaining, some fifty years after the first rise of Quakerism, an Affirmation Bill under which any person, conscientiously objecting to take an oath, may find shelter.


Attending a meeting, or riding to hold one, on Sunday, was another offence. On a Sunday in 1658, John Child, of Felsted, was arrested when proceeding to Wethersfield to be present at a gathering there. His horse was taken from him under a warrant, issued by Dudley Templar, a magistrate of Castle Hedingham, or near there, who had been a colonel of militia, and who was particularly energetic in granting summonses against the North Essex Friends. Child's horse was detained for three weeks, and when, at the end of that time, it was again restored to him, his saddle, bridle, pillion and cloth were detained for the keep of the horse during the period. He had already spent some time in the Castle for not paying tithes to the Earl of Warwick, and he was destined to end his days there, while undergoing a most wrongful imprisonment. During the time he lay incarcerated, his brother, Zachary Child, brought John's wife from Felsted to see him, she being also a most zealous Quaker. On their way



home, they were detained as suspicious persons by the constables, a whole night long in an inn yard, at Braintree, and brought next morning before Dudley Templar, who fined them ten shillings apiece. The poor lady had been grievously beaten when in a delicate state of health, for speaking to the officiating clergyman in Braintree church, and had been fined £10 for addressing questions to a minister named Perkins after the service in Felsted church. On another occasion she was in prison at Thaxted.

This town, with its magnificent church, a landmark from all the country round, had its Mayor and burgesses, who held their courts in the picturesque Moot Hall still standing at the fork of the hilly street. Friends of the town, and of the district immediately around, were imprisoned in this building, and very zealous were several of the Mayors for apprehending them. Samuel Samms, Mayor, in 1658, imprisoned and fined John Evans for putting a question to the parson. Edward Morrell, the same year, was put to prison for not paying tithes.

In 1670, the Mayor, Nathaniel Wesley, made heavy raids upon the property of Thomas Jervis, a timber-merchant, who had opened his



house for worship, there being then, apparently, no Meeting House. A team of horses was sent by Wesley, which drove away with fifteen loads of timber at one time. In all, losses to the extent of £128 6s. 7d. were sustained by this good Quaker, simply for having three meetings held in his house. Another Thaxted townsman of this time, Joseph Smith, who was a tallow chandler, had goods to the value of £50 17s. 9d. seized, including twelve score pounds of candles, and hop-poles, valued at £10, which doubtless were used in his drying shed, or warehouse, to hang bunches of dips upon.

In the next century, a very large and substantial red-brick building was erected in Thaxted by the Friends here, who were numerous and influential. But in a hundred years they had entirely died out, and the Meeting House, after being let for many years to the Baptists, has now been acquired by them for their own use.

In the extreme north of the county also, was another body of devoted Friends, for whom John Churchman, a farmer, offered his house at Wenden as a meeting place for those from the scattered villages round. In 1670, he was heavily distrained upon through the interference of an

informer, while many of those present were also severely penalised, although the meeting happened to have been held in silence, and the law empowered only a fine upon the preacher. Matthew Day, a draper, of Newport, lost goods to the value of £12 15s. Bridget Bingham and Mary Woodward, who were also there, had to see their household treasures—brass skillets and pewter dishes—carried off. Thomas Miller, of Ashdon, was another loser; and from James Pettit, of Wimbish, were taken his bed, bolster and pillow, with fifteen cheeses.


The imprisonments and annoyances of the Colchester Friends would need a whole chapter to themselves. Especially severe were they in 1664 and 1665, under William Moore, who was Mayor for those two years. A rough troop of soldiers recruited from all nationalities was sent several times to burst into their silent meetings, where they behaved with great brutality, striking men and women, tearing the clothes off their backs and destroying the building. It was on one of these occasions that they so belaboured poor Edward Grant that he died from their blows, a distinct act of manslaughter, if not worse, which in the heat of the times excited

no feelings of shame. The Society in Colchester grew very large and influential, as pointed out by Wilson Marriage in his introduction. Among the chief leaders were Steven Crisp and John Furley, who had been three times Mayor.

At Dedham, nine miles away, was a considerable body of Quakers, who met at the house of Samuel Groom. Among the members were Edward Horspit, Robert Mixer, Abraham Van Gover, a member of the Dutch colony and a bay-maker, and Job Spurgeon, who was very ill and at the point of death in Colchester Castle, but recovered. All these, and others from villages round, attending at Samuel Groom's house, were fined. From Splandine Rand, of Langham, twenty-one yards of French dowlas, a coarse kind of linen much in use then, was taken.

After Colchester, Felsted headed the county as the largest and most important meeting.

The Felsted Friends met probably in a private house, perhaps in that of John and Ann Child, or of the Choppings. Considerable accommodation would be needed for those who attended the General Meeting, held here, by George Fox's appointment, on 13th September, 1667. At



this important gathering, was undertaken the sub-division of the whole county into Monthly Meetings, a term which, contrary to appearances, denoted a geographical area more than a period for holding business meetings. The six areas were centred round Colchester, Coggeshall, Felsted, Witham, Thaxted, and Ham (since divided into East and West Ham, each of which is now a huge metropolitan borough), with which Waltham Abbey and Waltham Cross were united.


The Felsted Friends soon acquired for their own use a separate Meeting House, the erection of which was due chiefly to John Child, who must have been fairly well-to-do before he joined the Society, and had, like the other members of it, so much of his substance taken away for non-payment of tithes, or in fines for attending meetings.

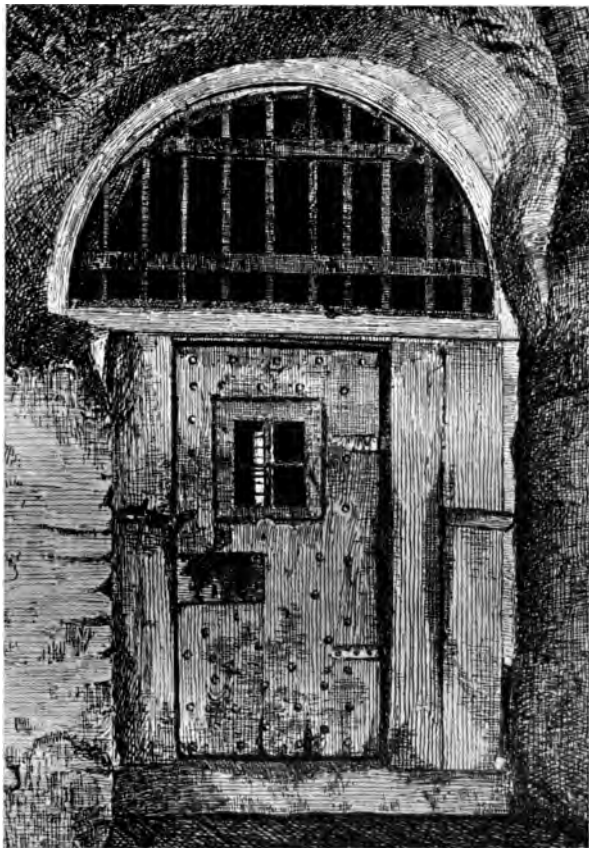
The Felsted Meeting House was erected upon a piece of ground called Little Oxeneys, purchased by John Child for £100, of the lady of the manor, for a term of 499 years eleven months. Before they had a public building of their own in which to shelter, the Felsted Friends met upon a curious mound upon Bannister Green,

where the Meeting House was built. Its situation was just over a mile from Felsted church, so that even under the oppressive Conventicle Act, they could, for a time, be suffered to assemble in peace. The mound has long held the name of Quaker's Mount. The trustees of the Felsted Meeting House in 1687 were John Jesper and Stephen Chopping, yeomen of Stebbing; Henry Smith and William Crow, of Felsted, yeomen; Joseph Foster, of Felsted, and Zachary Child, described as a husbandman, brother of the donor of the Meeting House.

At Stebbing and Saling, both within five or six miles, were also Meetings. In the latter place, Friends became very numerous, being joined on Sundays by those living at Bardfield, where the Meeting House was not built until some long time after. The Monthly Meeting of Felsted was dissolved in 1747, having become very small.

The oldest existing Meeting House in the county is that at Stebbing. Although now, I believe, unused, even for an annual gathering, it has been the scene, during 240 years, of many remarkable ministrations. It was built in 1675, nineteen years after Parnell's death, and





From a Drawing by

Ernest Poppy.

DOOR OF THE PRISON IN S.E. TOWER.



was visited by George Fox two years after, as he records in his Journal. The date appears upon some ornamental scroll work over the door. At this same time he preached in the small meeting-house at Saling, now a cottage, but still the property of the Monthly Meeting. When the original Meeting House at Felsted was built rather earlier, it was probably foreseen that the centre of the village of Stebbing was a more desirable site for so large and substantial a building, than the outlying green with its scattered houses, a mile or more from the village of Felsted.


To return to the Friends imprisoned in Colchester Castle. In 1656, the very year of Parnell's death, they arrived from every part of the county. John Sewell, of Gestingthorpe, near Castle Hedingham, was committed on a warrant of that same busy magistrate, Dudley Templar, for "speaking to the priest," *i.e.* for asking the priest who had been baptising an infant, to prove his practice by Scripture. The next year he was again committed. Jonathan Bundock, of West Bergholt, was despatched there by order of Parnell's accuser, Dionysius Wakering; Stephen Hubbersty and John

Davage were sent from Burnham. John Pollard, of Steeple Grange, for not swearing his answer to a bill for tithes was kept sixteen months in the Castle, and then taken to London to appear in the Court of Exchequer.

At Great Horkesley, the atrocity of making five Friends sit in the stocks for six hours each, was committed by Herbert Pelham, the same magistrate who signed the mittimus against Parnell. Their offence was that of attending a meeting held in the house of a widow, Margery Ball. Both she and her son, although the latter occupied no land, had been heavily distrained for tithes, as well as for "denying to pay" to the repair of the church bells.

John Empson and William Crowe, of Saling, were in prison in the Castle for "divers years," the former being at last released on petition of the impropriator, who was fearful lest the old man's death in prison should be laid to his charge.

Thomas Amey and John Adams, of Hadstock, were laid in prison more than once by Thomas Wallis, the vicar, for not paying tithes. Adams died in the Castle, in 1658. John Claydon, of the same town, passed a year in bonds on



an action for defamation by the same vicar. William Ennion, of Broxton, suffered there for the same cause.

After the Restoration and the passing of the Conventicle Act, soldiers burst into a silent meeting here and carried off several Friends to the Castle. Being authorised by the Act to fine all dissenting ministers £20, they fixed on one Thomas Lee as the preacher, and insisted on a Bible being given him, to see if he could read. They must have been somewhat disconcerted when he proceeded in a solemn and inspired manner to read aloud Jehoshaphat's prayer when the Ammonites assailed him: "O, our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us, neither know we what to do; but our eyes are upon Thee." On this passage his finger had rested in opening the book.

James Potter, of Marks Tey, was imprisoned from 25th November, 1655. John Eve, of Great Easton, died while detained a prisoner.

But the fires of spiritual liberty, and the right to worship as their own conscience bid them, were only fanned and fed into brighter and more enduring fervour, by these attempts

at suppression. As is pointed out in the Introduction (see p. 12), in Colchester alone the number of Friends doubled and trebled.

When a measure of indulgence as regards personal liberty was granted by Charles II., it was only to mulct the Quakers of their goods and possessions instead of taking their bodies, so cheerfully yielded, to lie in damp and unwholesome prisons. The tale of robbery is too long to be told here, but one or two instances of particular hardship may be given.

Robert Levitt, of Stebbing, spent three years in Colchester Castle, because he would not pay tithes to the support of the church. While there, he had £50 worth of his corn seized. In 1661, and the following years, he was sued at Chelmsford assizes ; for that year £36 ; in 1662, £24, and in 1663, £20 was recovered by the tithe owner. Another Stebbing man, Andrew Smith, lay eleven months in prison ; during his absence corn was taken from his barn and sold for £26.

Josiah Smyth, of Great Sampford, who occupied a farm of £78 annual rent, had 45 quarters of barley taken, which sold for £45, more than double the amount of the tithe claimed. On

another occasion, he was arrested by Sir Martin Lumley, Major Turner and ten horsemen, armed, who carried him off to Saffron Walden, where he was fined £5 for being a "friend to the quakers." The officer also helped himself to Smyth's "best horse," which was valued at £12; this the manuscript Book of Sufferings* tells us he rode till he died.

Those who had cattle and sheep farms, suffered by seeing twenty or thirty of their animals driven off, or it might be five or ten cows, upon which they depended for their butter and cheese. One poor man saw the produce of a whole season's making, fifteen or more cheeses, "nearly all he was worth," carried away.

From the honest and faithful widows, or hard working single women, the constables removed valuable brass skillets, pewter basins and dishes, iron pots and every conceivable kind of household implement.

In some cases, their very beds and bedding were confiscated. A widow of Pebmarsh, named Katherine Stow, in 1675, was informed

* The property of Essex and Suffolk Q.M., kept in the strong room at Colchester.

against by William Trussell, the rector of the place, for having meetings held in her house. She was therefore the chief sufferer, as may be seen when the list of plunder is read. Not only her pewter dishes and basins were seized, but she lost three feather beds, four bolsters and eight pillows, blankets, sheets, and of her own wearing apparel, three gowns, one silk petticoat, and five of other stuffs, beside a green apron.

At Coggeshall a vast impression was created by the arrest there of Parnell on that memorable 12th July. As we have already seen, no less than 2,000 persons attended the great meeting held by George Fox, about two months later while Parnell, his forerunner, still lay cheerfully in bonds. A Meeting House was acquired a very few years after, and a staunch body of Quakers arose. In 1670 they were subjected to much annoyance by informers, who came in on a Sunday at the end of July, when Samuel Cater, whose conversion from being a Baptist occurred about the time of Parnell's visit to Littleport (see p. 44), was praying. Cornet Maxey, who entered, struck Cater with his sword, and carried him prisoner to Kelvedon,

where, when the bench of magistrates sat on 14th August, he was fined £2 by Sir Thomas Abdy and Sir William Wiseman. Meanwhile, goods were distrained from every member of the congregation in default of payment of the fine, and the door of the Meeting House was securely fastened up by order of the magistrates. The congregation, however, continued to assemble in the street outside. It is interesting to leave on record some of the names and callings of these valiant folk. William Sewell, Robert Adams, and Robert Evans were apparently malsters; Robert Ludgater, as already mentioned, was a glover; Nathaniel Sparrow, a tanner; John Gage, a bay manufacturer; John Guyon, Cornelius Curtis and John Garrett were probably drapers. Richard Pemberton, Edward Mines, Robert Clarke, Nathaniel Gage, the Widow Guyon, and Widow Mootham, were also among those in the congregation fined.

Another of the early converts at Coggeshall was Richard Norton, a constable. Perhaps he was even one of those who were employed to arrest Parnell. Two years after, in July, 1658, he was fined £5 for refusing to take the oath of his office, although he had already served

as a constable at least one year and possibly more. Thomas Creeke, a weaver, was another Coggeshall man ; in the same year, his loom and a waggon, the two valued at £40 or £50, were taken from him because he refused to contribute to the repairs of the Church. That his landlord redeemed to him the goods by a payment of £30 seems a satisfying proof of his honest and good repute.

The tale of these good Essex people who remained steadfast to their faith and conscience, in spite of cruel hardships, might be lengthened much more, but this record must close with a couple of honoured names. Francis Marriage, of Stebbing, was one of the first trustees of the Meeting House there. He spent six months in prison in the castle in 1657, a year only after young Parnell's death ; and again, in 1660, he lay there for half a year. Humphrey Smith, of Saffron Walden, whose father had been a famous Herefordshire preacher before he became a Quaker, was several times imprisoned for refusing the oath of allegiance. Descendants of both these sturdy Friends have been very numerous in the county ever *since*.

These all died in the faith, having experienced
in this life much tribulation, but, as the wise
man of old said :

The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God
And there shall no torment touch them.
In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die,
And their departure is taken for misery,
And their going from us to be utter destruction :

But they are in peace.

For though they be punished in the sight of men,
Yet is their hope full of immortality,
And having been a little chastised, they shall be greatly
rewarded.

For God proved them,
And found them worthy for Himself,
As gold in the furnace hath He tried them.

—*Wisdom of Solomon*, iii. 1-6.

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